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## MORE BUSINESS PURPOSE IN TEACHERS ORGANIZATIONS

*To the Editor of the School Review:*

Your editorial on "More Business Purpose in Teachers' Organizations" in the November SCHOOL REVIEW touches a matter that has often been in my mind; especially when coming home, disappointed, from various teachers' institutes with the conviction that no action has been awakened, and that the audience has dispersed to as passive an existence individually as it exhibited collectively while gathered in the meeting hall. You imply that reform is possible, and I hope you are right; but there are serious obstacles to be overcome, and these should be carefully reckoned. There is no great difficulty in securing active speakers to urge improvement in school conditions; the real difficulty lies in the inertness of the audience. It is generally made up of persons who are only trained in carrying their points with their juniors and inferiors, and who therefore sit in exceeding silence and submissiveness in the presence of their equals. For this reason it is hardly fair to expect such activity in teachers' organizations as is found in the L. A. W., whose membership consists largely of active young professional and business men, well trained in carrying their points or contesting for them with their peers in the affairs of everyday life. Here it is natural to expect energetic and outspoken action under organization. While this contrast prevails, I do not believe that it is possible to obtain any real action from the body of a teachers' meeting. It is only from the councils of such meetings that serious action should be looked for; and little enough of it is found there. As you remarked, current action deals too much with method, which at best ought to be largely individual, and neglects many larger and more important matters of substance, which must in the nature of the case be relatively universal, through the public

school system of a state. To mention a specific instance, let me consider the case of state topographical maps. For several years past, I have taken every occasion to urge teachers in Massachusetts and Connecticut to unite in demanding from their states that a copy of the state map should be placed in every public school, but with no perceptible result as yet. Many teachers look at the sample maps exhibited in my discourses as strange, peculiar objects, which might discharge questions at them that they could not answer. Some look at the maps as if they admit the possibility of their value in school work, but feel hopelessly unable to bring forward this value themselves. Some of the better trained and more intelligent say that such maps would certainly be useful if furnished to the schools, and yet they do not make the first move in a united effort to get the maps. I have yet to learn of the first instance of organized action among teachers to secure from the state these useful aids in their work.

In Rhode Island, where the state map has been distributed to all the schools, I have made an attempt in a somewhat different direction; namely, towards the use of the map in the intelligent teaching of local, and thus of general, geography. Several addresses on the truisms here involved awakened some appreciative questions from a few of the more outspoken teachers in my audiences, but in face of the admitted ignorance as to the way in which the maps should be used there has not been, to my knowledge, a single intimation of a proposal from the teachers that they should demand from the state the appropriate tools for this part of their trade; that the state should provide them with a brief manual on the use of the map which it has so generously distributed, and which today hangs so uselessly on so many schoolroom walls. Giving up hope of initiation on the part of the teachers, I at length secured the official approval of Mr. Hine at Hartford and Mr. Stockwell at Providence for the preparation and distribution to all the grammar schools in Connecticut and Rhode Island of a pamphlet explaining how the state maps might be used; and these pamphlets are now in

the teachers' hands; but, as far as I can learn, they fall flat, because the teachers have not in their own education had the training that enables them to see a geographical fact outdoors; it must be in print in a book in order to be usable in teaching. Now I am sure that many teachers lament this inability to use the plentiful materials that the state in its natural and official capacity has spread before them; but it never seems to occur even to these most advanced and thoughtful teachers that they should unite in a demand for a better preparation of their successors in the normal schools. Indeed, on mentioning this altruistic plan to one who is professionally well acquainted with teachers, he said it was not to be expected that they would thus proclaim their sense of their own shortcomings. If this be the true reason of inaction, it certainly shows a narrow and selfish view of the place of the teacher in the state, and I am disposed to explain inaction on other grounds, such as the lack of invention or the habit of submission to existing conditions. But from the beginning to the end of the raid that I have been making on existing methods in the teaching of geography in the public schools, I have not seen one single indication of large-minded and united action on the part of the teachers; not a single attempt to use the great power that they might exert in the direction of the improvement of the system of which they are a part. While lamenting the fact, I am glad to see that you are drawing attention to it. Is such inertia inherent in teachers' organizations, or is it merely a temporary phase of their development, to be outlived within an approaching short period of time? For one, I earnestly desire to see more reaction on the part of the teachers upon the system that creates them.

W. M. DAVIS

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,  
Nov. 8, 1896